

Town of Milan Comprehensive Plan

2. Central Findings

Chapter Highlights:

Milan's citizens value the rural quality of life the Town offers and want to keep Milan rural. Underlying the rural character of Milan is its rugged and varied topography, environmental resources and open space. Explosive growth threatens our rural character and risks causing ever higher taxes to support our schools. Milan's current zoning is outmoded and does not enable us to protect the environmental resources and rural residential character so valued by residents.



Town of Milan Comprehensive Plan

2. Central Findings

Central Findings of the Comprehensive Plan Board

A. Introduction

Milan's citizens have spoken clearly about what they want for the future of their Town. Repeatedly, in surveys, in public forums, workshops, letters, e-mails and conversation, as documented in the appendices to this report, people speak up to say that they live here because of the rural character of the Town. Protecting the rural residential quality of life, the environment, and the scenic beauty of the Town is *the* priority. Rather than talk about the need for jobs or business opportunities, the very large majority of people talk about Milan as a residential community, as a Town between other towns that provide those opportunities. Residents see Milan as a Town whose topography and transportation infrastructure are not conducive to commercial enterprise other than small, local, service-oriented establishments. Residents want to protect and retain the natural beauty and serenity of their rural residential community.

The values and priorities of the Town have been summarized and reviewed in numerous surveys, forums, workshop, presentations and meetings. They are as follows:

- 1) Maintain the rural character of Milan.
- 2) Remain (primarily) a Residential Community.
- 3) Enable small-scale and limited commercial activity.
- 4) Protect open space and natural resources.
- 5) Keep Milan affordable and accessible to current residents.

B. Existing Conditions and Trends

Growth and consequent impacts on the environment and the community, given today's zoning and land-use regulations, threaten the realization of the values and priorities Milan citizens have expressed. The following discussion of existing conditions and trends addresses environmental resources protection, population growth, the potential future build-out of Milan, taxes and new zoning concepts.

1) Environmental resources protection. Milan has a very rugged and varied topography, with numerous streams and wetlands, steep slopes, ridgelines, wildlife and habitats. Sole source aquifers supply Milan's drinking water; our water resources affect downstream water quality through the watersheds to our west and south in Dutchess County. These environmental resources contribute to Milan's natural beauty, attractiveness, and rural character. That's why Milan residents rate protection of our environmental resources as a very important priority for the future. Yet we have few protections in place for these important resources of our Town. We do not know today what exists in a comprehensive way, as Milan is one of the few towns in Dutchess County that has not completed a Natural Resources Inventory (our Conservation Advisory Council is in the process of doing this work). Wetlands in some areas of town have not been mapped. Protection of our environmental resources should guide where and how we permit development.

2) Population. The current population of Milan is approximately 2,527. Milan's natural beauty, proximity to the New York metropolitan area and location along the Taconic State Parkway are causing dramatic growth, rising land and home prices, and dramatically increasing rates of development. As depicted in Table 2.1, Milan grew significantly faster in the decade of the 1990s than any of our surrounding towns, and more than three times as fast as their average growth rate. Rapid growth is continuing, with the estimated population of Milan increasing more than 7% in the three years since the last census in 2000. This increase exceeds previous estimates of population growth by a wide margin.

Town of Milan Comprehensive Plan

2. Central Findings

Table 2.1 Milan Area Population Growth

TOWN	1990	2000	% Change	Est. 7/1/2003	% Change
Milan	1,875	2,356	25.7%	2,527	7.3%
Clermont	1,443	1,726	19.6%	1,798	4.2%
Pine Plains	2,287	2,569	12.3%	2,674	4.1%
Red Hook	9,565	10,408	8.8%	10,990	5.6%
Clinton	3,760	4,010	6.6%	4,168	3.9%
Rhinebeck	7,558	7,762	2.7%	8,118	4.6%
Stanford	3,495	3,544	1.4%	3,708	4.6%
Gallatin	1,658	1,499	-9.6%	1,471	-1.9%
TOTAL	31,611	33,874	7.2%	35,454	4.7%

Source: New York State Data Center web site, 10/28/2004

<http://www.nylovesbiz.com/nysdc/popandhous/ESTIMATE.asp>

The data in Table 2.1 represents census population and estimates; it does not fully account for the population of second home owners who reside elsewhere and are not counted in Milan's census statistics. This data also does not include the pending development in Town. In 2004 there was a dramatic increase in the number of applications for residential site approvals, from an average of under 20 a year over the last 10 years, and 23 in 2003, to 72 in 2004. This does not include any activity from the proposed (but not yet detailed) application expected from the Durst Corporation for the Carvel property, which at the time of initial announcement proposed 975 homes on the property, which lies along the border of Pine Plains and Milan.

The population density in Milan at the time of the 2000 census was approximately 65 people per square mile, the lowest in Dutchess County. When the population represented by second home owners is included, the density is approximately 80 people per square mile. New York State defines a rural community as one with a population density of less than 150 people per square mile. With appropriate land use controls, we can roughly double our population and remain "rural" by the state's definition. However, statistical analysis of population density is only one aspect of defining and protecting rural character.

3) Development patterns: Historically, Milan has been a rural town consisting of primarily farms and woodlands, with small areas of more compact development in hamlet centers located at key intersections. Agriculture's role in Milan's land use has diminished substantially and today few traditional farms remain. Residential development has shifted to the open countryside and away from the hamlet centers.

The Town Zoning Code encourages compact mixed-use development in the hamlets. Lafayetteville and Rock City were formerly centers with greater vitality than exists today: each can be revitalized with flexible planning and controlled development options. The proximity of Lafayetteville to the planned golf and recreation community on the former Carvel property and its location between the Taconic State Parkway and Pine Plains suggests growing pressure for hamlet development in the future. Effective planning in Rock City will require intermunicipal coordination and planning with the Towns of Red Hook and Rhinebeck.

4) Build-out analysis. Using 2003 data, the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council completed a build-out analysis for the northern Dutchess communities. Table 2.2 shows that Milan has over 9,800 buildable acres (buildable acres subtracts land that cannot be built on because it is protected, is

Town of Milan Comprehensive Plan

2. Central Findings

too steep or too wet, or for other reasons) spread across its various zoning districts. Using a standard 20% reduction to reflect the needed addition of infrastructure to support development, and to allow for odd lot size in some cases, the maximum number of potential new lots is then calculated by dividing the acres by the minimum lot size. In Milan's case, this would yield an additional 2,356 building sites.

Table 2.2 2003 Milan Build-Out Analysis

Zone	Min Lot Size	Total Buildable Acres	Minus 20%	Potential New Lots
A3A	3	4,587	3,669	1,223
HA	1	230	184	184
LC	5	58	47	9
R2A	2	631	505	252
A5A	5	4,299	3,439	688
TOTAL		9,805	7,844	2,356

Our current residential sites number nearly 1,100, so the total residential sites, if built out, would be approximately 3,450. If our density today is 65 people per square mile, this would suggest that Milan could grow to a density of around 200 people per square mile, not including second home owners; if they are included, the density rises to approximately 250 people per square mile. Of course, such build-out projections are theoretical and long-term. However, the magnitude of the build-out indicates that under our current zoning we would at some future time become a suburban community, no longer "rural"

5) Taxes. A Marist College study completed in 2001 for the Town of Unionvale, when reconstructed for Milan, shows that the town is well positioned in the efficient use of its tax base, compared to other towns in Dutchess County. A significant finding of the study was that such tax health is directly correlated with density of population in Dutchess County. As population density increases, there are more demands on town services. In their comments on the plan, many residents have expressed concern about the cost of property taxes in Town.

The significant driver of property taxes is the support of our school districts. Using state measurements that exclude debt service, transportation, and special education, the three school districts serving Milan have roughly the same cost of educating a child, around \$7,000 per year. Red Hook has published a planning document for use with its municipal officials which states that a typical new home has 1.5 children, who cost the school district \$10,350 each year. In Milan, a new house would have to be assessed at approximately \$600,000 to provide that amount of tax revenue and break even on school taxes. Houses assessed at less than that add to the taxes paid by others in the school district. Rapid development of average-priced homes brings with it increased taxes to educate the added students. Rapid development also causes the need to build new school facilities and buy more buses, which is over and above the cost of education as defined above. Clearly, there is little a school district can do to control development—that power rests with the municipal officials in the Towns they serve. We see the impact of school taxes in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3 Town of Milan Taxes 1999–2004

	Year 1999	Year 2003	Year 2004	One-year Increase	Five-year Increase	% total 2004
Total tax levy	4,125,863	4,742,330	5,413,765	14.2%	31.2%	100.0%
County	680,417	565,164	689,923	22.1%	1.4%	12.7%
School	2,926,949	3,519,189	4,015,549	14.0%	37.2%	74.2%

Town of Milan Comprehensive Plan

2. Central Findings

Town & district	518,496	657,977	708,293	7.6%	36.6%	13.1%
-----------------	---------	---------	---------	------	-------	-------

There are essentially two ways to slow school tax growth. One relates to residential development. Rapid residential development brings large numbers of new students to the community, but the average new home pays less in school taxes than the cost of education. By slowing residential development, school taxes will rise less rapidly. On the other side of this equation is the addition of new, large-lot homes that more than pay their way in taxes.

A second way to influence residential tax growth is through added commercial development, which provides some additional tax revenue. However, it is important to understand the limited impact of commercial development on the tax base. The Red Hook School Board report highlights that the new Hannaford Market's annual taxes pay for the education costs of only 24 students. It takes a lot of commercial development to meaningfully affect taxes. Milan citizens have made clear that they do not want large-scale development and that they want to protect Route 199 from strip development. With the exception of the Route 199 corridor, the topography and road system of Milan are such that there are few areas of town that are conducive to commercial development.

6) New zoning concepts. A great deal of change is now underway across our county, state, and nation with respect to zoning regulations. Zoning grew largely out of the desire to manage the explosive suburban growth that occurred after World War II. What has been learned the hard way is that traditional zoning, which sets fixed lot sizes and uses in discrete areas of a municipality, causes sprawl, suburbanization, and destruction of our landscapes. The consequences of traditional suburban-style zoning do not contribute to our rural quality of life. New, more flexible approaches to the management of growth and development are gaining rapid acceptance, and can help us to maintain Milan as the rural residential community our citizens want for their future.

C. Goals and Visions

The following goals and visions for Milan's future growth reflect the values and priorities of the citizens as recorded at numerous workshops and forums:

1) Maintain the rural character of Milan.

Rural can be described as a landscape where the predominant feature is the natural environment such as open space, farmland, woodlands and water bodies, and the intrusion of development is minimal. In rural areas, population density is low and commercial and residential uses are concentrated in villages or hamlets. When the residents of Milan are asked what they mean by "rural," they have varying responses: To some it is open fields and active agriculture; to others it is forested slopes, undisturbed wetlands and ample wildlife habitat. To some, rural implies historical agricultural structures and fences along the road; to others, rural means dark skies at night, quiet and solitude. Most embrace all of these as elements of rural character. Protection of these natural resources is an important aspect of preserving Milan's rural character.

Relatively low population density is one element of rural character. New York State classifies rural as less than 150 residents per square mile. Milan, depending on whether "weekenders" are included, has a density today of 65 to 80 people per square mile, the lowest in Dutchess County. If full build-out were permitted, the Town would approach a density of 250 people per square mile, and much of its rural character would be lost. Milan has room to grow, but future density must be restrained if Milan is to protect its environmental resources and remain rural. Uncontrolled growth is the antithesis of rural character.

Town of Milan Comprehensive Plan

2. Central Findings

2) Remain (primarily) a Residential Community.

With its hilly, rocky terrain, large and numerous wetlands, and with only one major road (Route 199) on which commercial activity is feasible (and portions of that pass through sensitive environmental lands), there is consensus that Milan is not conducive to commercial and industrial development. People want to see Milan remain a predominantly residential community because the impacts of any substantial amount of highway business and light industrial activity will directly affect the quality of life in residential areas or will cause more intense development along Route 199 than is desirable.

The Town's two hamlets along Route 199, Rock City and Lafayetteville, are primarily residential, although they do have limited commercial mixed use. Lands off the highway have, in the past, converted from agriculture to open space (or remained undeveloped) due to the lack of prime farmlands and the difficult topography. Development of these lands, driven by the classic suburban zoning model that eats up space and creates sprawl, threatens the Town's vision of its future as a rural community. Keeping our rural land rural requires a change of development patterns in the Town. Milan must protect more of its open space and environmental resources, constrain the growth of residential units, and sensitively locate development if it is to maintain its rural character.

3) Enable small-scale and limited commercial activity.

The Town is not opposed to commercial activity; however, residents indicate a strong preference for commercial activity that serves the people of Milan. Focusing commercial activity in the mixed-use environment of the hamlets and in home-based businesses, with limited, well-designed highway business activity along Route 199, is consistent with the vision Milan residents have for our town.

4) Protect open space and natural resources.

Important elements in our rural character are the quality of our water resources and our natural landscape. Milan citizens want to see their environmental resources protected. Water resources and wetlands, open space, ridgeline vistas, steep slopes, and contiguous habitat protections are all highly valued. Frequently mentioned are dark skies at night and the quiet that still remain in Milan, but have vanished in other areas due to insensitive and uncontrolled growth.

5) Keep Milan affordable and accessible to current residents.

Three elements affect affordable housing:

- 1) The need to control property tax growth.
- 2) The need for senior living opportunities.
- 3) Availability of affordable housing.

These issues should complement one another in the Town's planning. Without large-scale commercial development, constraint on rising taxes (heavily influenced by school taxes and, in turn, by the expansion of moderately priced residential housing) depends on the development patterns permitted by the zoning and subdivision regulations adopted by the Town Board.

People in Town value a diverse community. It is important that the Town continue to provide the opportunity for moderate-income families to own homes in Milan; affordable housing to support young families and our municipal workforce is needed. Such housing opportunities can best be provided on smaller lots in traditional neighborhoods. Growth of this nature in compact small neighborhoods is

Town of Milan Comprehensive Plan

2. Central Findings

consistent with classic rural development patterns, which have unfortunately been lost in the zoning practices of the last half century. Milan is fortunate to be able to respond to and modify such development patterns for the future.

D. Summary

Milan today is at a crossroads. It is a rural and primarily residential community with significant natural assets. The Town's rural character is being challenged by growth, growth that has been significant over the last decade and, from current indications, is accelerating. The Town Board, in choosing to update the Comprehensive Plan at this time, has directed the community's attention to planning for the future and new directions to realize its goals and visions. The findings of the CPB's research and the directions embraced by our citizens have resulted in an integrated set of recommendations to accomplish the values and priorities of Milan residents. Subsequent chapters detail the CP recommendations, beginning with a chapter that outlines course changes in land-use management policies that will enable the Town to retain Milan's rural residential character.